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ABSTRACT

Community historians often limit their efforts to periods of written records; this, despite the fact that many communities have witnessed some form of prehistoric human occupation. Prehistory is the study of human events before the advent of written accounts. The community historian interested in prehistory, which has as its main focus material remains, must become involved in archaeology. While most archaeological efforts are beyond the resources and experience of most local historians, there are several ways in which one can conduct archaeological research without undertaking activities that may be impractical or inappropriate. This guide makes suggestions for archaeological research in the context of New York State; yet, most of the suggestions are applicable to other locales as well. (DB)

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DOCUMENTING PREHISTORIC HABITATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

A Guide for Local Historians

PHILIP LORD, JR.

New York State Museum Circular No. 55

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FOREWORD

There is hardly a community in New York that has not witnessed some form of prehistoric human occupation. Yet local historians usually limit their community history efforts to the period of written records. For some this is a matter of choice; for others it reflects the lack of an obvious and feasible alternative. Because of this, local history is often artificially foreshortened by up to 10,000 years, during which time human populations may have inhabited the areas being researched.

Lacking documents for this period, one must rely on material remains. When only physical evidence exists, the earth itself becomes the document. The community historian, in order to fully pursue his or her task, has a need to know the information the earth contains – to become involved in archeology.

For most historians interested in researching the prehistoric aspects of local human activity, the efforts of archeological survey are beyond their resources and expertise, and they are rightfully counseled not to disturb archeological sites without professional supervision.

Yet there are avenues open to historians that would allow them to integrate a fairly instructive reconstruction of prehistoric events into the local history being developed. This circular is an attempt to introduce the local historian to the field of prehistory and to suggest several ways in which one can conduct archeological research without undertaking activities that may be impractical or inappropriate.

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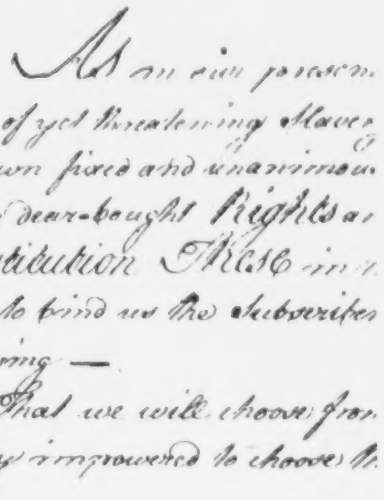
WHAT IS PREHISTORY?

Prehistory is the study of human events before the advent of written accounts. Since there are no documents, the study has traditionally been carried on by anthropologists, not historians. Because the only comprehensive record of prehistoric activity is the material left buried in the ground, research in this field has been undertaken by archeologists who conduct field surveys and site excavations in order to obtain the primary data used in their chronological and cultural reconstructions.

In the Northeast, archeological research usually involves surface and subsurface survey; i.e., the inspection of visible sites and materials in eroded or cultivated areas and the excavation of carefully controlled and recorded shovel units or hand-trowelled squares to locate buried occupation remains. In addition, archeologists conduct meticulous analysis on all recovered artifacts and materials, including the recording of soil strata and field provenience data (location in the ground). Derived from this effort is an ongoing reconstruction of prehistoric culture in New York that presently extends backward in time over 10,000 years.

In eastern North America there is a fairly sharp break between prehistoric and historic times. The contrast is quite profound, and the shift abrupt, between aboriginal populations inhabiting the land but without a documentary tradition and European explorers and immigrants arriving fairly late in the span of American cultural development yet bringing with them the fully developed process of history.



WHY INCLUDE PREHISTORY?

Local historians usually begin their reconstruction effort with the earliest European settlement, generally characterized as the Colonial period, and consider themselves lucky if they can locate some documented occurrence of such early activity in their community. This conceptual approach to history makes political sense in that the society, as a national entity with social, economic and political continuity into the present, began with European occupation. However, this approach

leaves out over 10,000 years of confirmed human occupation in New York State. This omission makes little cultural sense if history is to be defined as "a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events." If the emphasis of the concept of "recording events" is shifted away from the idea of a record written contemporaneously with the event itself, and the process of recording is liberated from an immediate connection with the activity being recorded, then history becomes a transcendent concept, not bound to libraries and archives, and the term prehistory as something separate from history really loses much of its relevance.

Of most basic and immediate concern to local historians is the reconstruction of an accurate and comprehensive chronology of events. If local history is to be an account of all human activity in an area, and not only an account of some categories or periods of activity, then aboriginal occupation has to be included in the field of interest. This is particularly true when one considers that the historic period (circa AD 1500-present) makes up less than four percent of all human occupation in New York.

As historical/cultural research becomes less focused on simple chronology and becomes more focused on the interaction of people and their environment - on economic systems and the utilization of natural resources at various times in the past - the inclusion of prehistoric events in the study becomes even more appropriate. A socio-political system is derived from the geographic unit and natural resource base in which it is rooted and from which it draws sustenance. This is most particularly true here, where rapid European immigration and the exploitation of a vast and rich natural environment produced a dramatically new cultural configuration at the opening of the historic period. It must be realized, however, that these resources also supported and were utilized by large Native populations with sophisticated cultural systems of their own long before the colonists imposed their European model on what they saw as vacant land.

Certainly in the late 20th century, when our often fragile relationship with the environment is a matter of continued concern, it would be of immediate interest to explore how people, much like ourselves, survived life in the severe northeastern climate for thousands of years unassisted by modern technology, complex economic systems, or massive networks of international trade.

Prehistory affords the historian an opportunity to examine the modes of environmental adaptation by which Native groups utilized local natural resources to sustain their populations. At times these adaptations may have been extremely different from those documented in Colonial times. Contrast, for example, the elaborate use of local flints for tools and weapons during prehistoric times with almost nonexistent use by the

colonists, who preferred imported European flints for their muskets and fire kits.

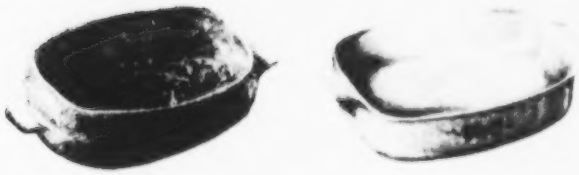
There may be evident in these adaptations a similar appreciation for the particular characteristics of a material, although the form may differ profoundly from prehistoric to historic times. Take, for example, heat-retentive northeastern soapstone being carved by Native Americans to create the first fireproof cooking vessels in New York over 3,000 years before later residents used the same material for bed warmers.

On occasion one might find continuity, rather than contrast, in such comparison, as when one tries to differentiate Native and Colonial ash splint baskets or compares carbonized fish net from 600 BC with fish nets from the eighteenth century.

Contrast and continuity between prehistoric and early historic cultures in New York State may not only be an interesting study in itself but may also open up to the student of history alternative ways of dealing with the demands and opportunities of the northeastern woodlands, revealed in a time before the Industrial Revolution began to separate and insulate people from their environment.

Of all peoples who have inhabited New York, the prehistoric societies were certainly in most direct and immediate contact with their environments. For those today contemplating the loss of some of the insulating factors that not only protect us from the ravages of the environment but also tend to prevent us from experiencing that same environment to any great depth, a studied consideration of our prehistoric predecessors may be revealing as well as entertaining. We may surprisingly find delicate links across thousands of years that seem to rein-

force our shared humanity and bind us somehow closer as kindred inhabitors of the same world. Consider the uncanny similarity between the earliest form of fireproof Native cookware and the most modern form illustrated below.



THE PREHISTORY OF NEW YORK

It may be valuable to briefly consider how New York came to have a prehistory and what generally characterized the inhabitants during this period.

Paleo-Indian Period (11,000 BC–8000 BC)

Over 12,000 years ago, small bands of nomadic big game hunters entered New York State. They came from Asia by way of a land bridge connecting Alaska with Siberia, migrating south of a massive ice sheet that covered much of northern New York during the last continental Ice Age. They learned to exploit the various resources they found here, including large game animals such as caribou and the now extinct mammoth and mastodon. Their campsites, workshops, and stone tools are sparsely scattered along the river valleys of the State and provide our only record of the first inhabitants of New York.

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Archaic Period (8000 BC–1000 BC)

By 8000 BC many of the large animals these people hunted became extinct as the ice sheet retreated and the climate began to warm up. As their numbers increased and the large animals that were their principal food supply vanished, these aboriginal hunters became dependent on smaller game and the gathering of wild plant foods, adapting to the numerous local environments that existed in New York State during the 7,000 year Archaic Period. During the final several hundred years of this era, a transition into the period of ceramics was begun by the introduction of carved soapstone cooking pots, the first truly fireproof cooking vessels of prehistoric New York.

Woodland Period (1000 BC–1600 AD)

Subsequently, during the Woodland Period, these groups began to adopt the more sedentary technologies of agriculture and pottery making, along with more refined stone and bone tool kits. By AD 1200 they had founded numerous large villages, often protected with stockades built of upright logs, in which to house their expanding populations. Archeological remains of this period dot the landscape and provide valuable insight into the development of prehistoric village farming.

Contact Period (AD 1600–AD 1780)

Although contact between "Indians" and Europeans by definition implies the advent of the "Historic Period", this contact was gradual, and portions of New

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York remained beyond the range of "history" while others became infiltrated by European material goods and the tradition of recording human activity in writing.

By AD 1600 the effects of initial contacts with European explorers, traders, and missionaries were being felt, and by AD 1780 wars, diseases, and European technology had taken a heavy toll on native culture and populations in New York State. The archeological sites from this period contain evidence of this cultural contact, conflict, and change that is of particular interest in the modern world and they constitute a record of one of the most significant chapters in the history of New York. Since contemporary records were often inaccurate, incomplete, or distorted by political or social bias, a true picture of this Contact Period can only be reconstructed from the archeological record buried within our soils.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW SURVEY

The first priority of the local historian as "prehistorian" is to confirm that a community in fact has a prehistory, i.e., that evidence of prehistoric occupation exists and its location has been noted.

Unless the published results of previous archeological surveys of the locale are available, the historian must personally undertake the task of collecting this information. The most efficient way for the historian to conduct an archeological survey is to conduct a survey of the landowners who inhabit the area of interest.

It is rare that evidence of prehistoric occupation in an area, namely artifacts that have survived into the 20th century, has not been noted by someone over the years during which historic occupation of the area has occurred. Collections may have

been made by farmers from plowed fields or by home owners from vegetable and flower gardens. Recollections of these finds may persist among residents and the collections themselves may remain among family possessions. It is not uncommon, however, for the historical value of these artifacts to have been overlooked and the objects dispersed, lost, given away, or even sold. In such cases, accurate information on what the artifacts were and where they were found may not be recoverable.

Avid relic collectors or amateur and professional archeologists may have conducted surveys or even site excavations in the area under study. Usually these persons have obtained permission from the landowner to enter the land for these purposes and often they will have discussed their findings with the landowner. Occasionally the landowner will ask to retain the collection that results from these activities.

Local landowner interviews will often produce a surprisingly high level of prehistoric information, therefore, and represent the most effective technique for discovering prehistoric evidence short of full-scale surface and subsurface archeological survey.

Additional, undiscovered archeological sites that are unknown to anyone may exist in an area. Sites once known to exist may also have been forgotten and passed forever from the recollection of living residents. The semisecretive activities of some relic collectors may prevent knowledge of known archeological sites from reaching even the owner of the land on which they exist, or the owner himself may be a collector desiring to protect his find and his property from the attention of others. But these factors cannot effectively be addressed within the scope of this proposal.

USING ARCHEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Although a great deal of information can be obtained from landowner or collector interviews, this information is often in raw form, frequently existing only as unorganized collections of prehistoric artifacts. An archeologist may be able to obtain fairly detailed cultural and technological

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data from collections where little else but artifacts remain. For the historian, however, it is the chronological data that should be the first priority when examining artifacts. This is not only sufficient to the purposes of the historic reconstruction project but is sufficiently easy to distill, without advanced training, from the types of artifact collections normally encountered in the community.

How does the historian, faced with a cigar box of apparently unrelated and undescribed artifacts, derive some sort of meaningful information about prehistoric occupation of a community that can be related to the historic record already reconstructed?

The first step is to confirm the origin of the artifacts in the collection. It is not uncommon for personal collections of "arrowheads" to contain items that came from outside the area of interest. While it is always tempting to include the more culturally interesting or exotic specimens in any reconstruction of local prehistory being attempted, it is often these very same artifacts that may have been collected or even purchased from more distant sources. Since the motivation of the collector is usually to accumulate unique specimens, not to interpret local cultural history, it is understandable that the importance of the origin of an object may be lost in the owner's enthusiasm for the unusual characteristics of the object itself. For this reason extra care should be taken to insure that the objects examined are indeed native to the area in question. Questionable associations with the area should be dealt with only as probabilities.

Once a collection of artifacts from a location or locations within the research area has been isolated, historians may, for their purposes, concentrate only on projectile points, and only on those sufficiently whole to permit dating by typological means. Projectile points are "diagnostic artifacts" in that they usually identify a time period and cultural affiliation. One may, of course, broaden one's investigation beyond projectile points when an archeologist is available to examine and comment on other, less diagnostic artifacts. In addition, some nondiagnostic artifacts may indicate a particular function or activity and therefore be historically interesting, even though they do not suggest a particular time period or cultural identification. For example, a notched pebble netsinker suggests prehistoric fishing activity that might correlate with local historic themes, such as sport or commercial fishing, even though one cannot determine from the artifact itself whether the prehistoric fisherman lived 800 or 8,000 years ago.

Of course if such nondiagnostic but culturally interesting artifacts appear to come from a single component site where all the diagnostic artifacts appear to date to one prehistoric period, then temporal and cultural identity can be assigned, or at least suggested.

THE CONCEPT OF TYPOLOGY

Aboriginal populations have lived in New York State since 10,000 BC, leaving evidence of their occupation buried in the ground. As these people changed from the nomadic big-game hunters of the Paleo-Indian Period to the settled farmers first encountered by European explorers, the tools and weapons they used also changed.

During prehistoric times these tools were primarily made of stone, bone, wood, and shell. Repeated saturation with rainwater and the acidity of local soils have destroyed most of what these people created. The most enduring artifacts, those surviving in significant numbers into the present century, were fashioned of stone.

The form tools took and the designs after which they were fashioned were determined in part by their intended function and in part by cultural patterns that dictated "correct" shape in much the same manner as clothing styles are determined by social guidelines of acceptability today. Such styles change with time, and by knowing what changes occurred and at what time in the past, we can date an object by its form or type. The greater the variation in form an object displays over time, the greater our ability to place that object accurately in a chronological sequence.

Those surviving aboriginal tools which exhibit the greatest change in style over time are projectile points: sharpened pieces of stone and metal often referred to as "arrowheads". However, since the bow and arrow was not in general use in New York until after AD 1000, most of these projectile points were actually made to be attached to hand-held

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spears, thrown javelins, or darts propelled at game with the aid of a throwing stick called an "atlatl."

Projectile points themselves cannot generally be dated directly, since they are usually made of stone millions of years old. But with the help of radiocarbon dating techniques, archeologists over the years have dated the charred remains of wood and bone with which particular projectile point types have been found, and by this association have placed these artifacts in time.

Radiocarbon dating of organic matter found on archeological sites is possible because radioactive Carbon 14 is produced in the atmosphere by cosmic radiation. Carbon 14 is taken up by all living organisms and is maintained at a constant level until the death of the organism cuts off the supply. Since Carbon 14 is a radioactive element, it decays into non-radioactive elements at a predictable rate. The amount of Carbon 14 left in the organic sample indicates the time that has elapsed since it ceased to live. Thus if wood from a prehistoric campfire contained enough radioactive carbon to suggest an elapsed time of 5,000 years, we can suppose that the fire was kindled within a few months of the death of the tree in about 3000 BC and that projectile point types found in association with that campfire were made and lost about the same time.

From this evidence, scientists have been able to determine the time period during which particular point types were being manufactured, the duration of their popularity, and when they were replaced by new, improved forms. Since rarely more than one type is found in the same buried cultural level, relatively accurate information can be obtained from the carefully controlled excavation of archeological sites, making possible the development of a detailed chronological sequence of projectile point types for New York State.

Such a sequence is just the first step in a long and painstaking process of scientific site excavation and analysis, leading eventually to the reconstruction of the cultures of New York's prehistoric inhabitants.

ARTIFACT COLLECTIONS AS A DATA BASE

Having located a collection of prehistoric artifacts, and using charts, diagrams and publications on the typology of New York State projectile points, the historian can arrange the collection chronologically and can assign names and dates to the clusters of types. The best guide for this purpose is "A TYPOLOGY AND NOMENCLATURE FOR NEW YORK PROJECTILE POINTS" by William A. Ritchie, former State Archeologist. It is a comprehensive presentation of all types commonly encountered in field collections with detailed drawings, date ranges, and measurements for each. It also provides photographs of actual collections of each type. Since there is a significant amount of variability in each type, and since it is occasionally difficult to match a particular artifact with the illustrated, and somewhat idealized, "type artifact," these photographs are of particular utility.

Once a date is assigned, as best as can be, to an artifact or cluster of similar artifacts, two things are immediately known. First, assuming it has been confirmed as being from the locality under study, one can say that people occupied the area, if even briefly, at a period in prehistory of known date. Second, the cultural lifeways of these inhabitants can be described by virtue of the general knowledge already assembled and published for that time period in New York State, based on decades of intensive archeological research.

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Usually only fragmentary and incomplete artifact collections will be located and examined by the historian. However, the temporal affiliation of the local occupation derived from typological dating techniques applied to these collections can allow the researcher to "tie in" this information to the more comprehensive cultural data obtained by scientists from many other sites of the same period of prehistory. It is not at all inappropriate to relate published descriptions of prehistoric societies derived from years of scientific survey and excavation to a local site that has produced little more than a handful of datable arrowheads. The cultural patterns that dictated the day to day activities, economy, and technology at any one time of prehistory were generally exhibited by all populations in the State at the same time. We can extrapolate from a few diagnostic artifacts to the whole fabric of cultural processes and include descriptions of human activity for which we may have virtually no local physical evidence.

Having fleshed out the prehistory of the locality from published materials, using the dates derived from the collections as a starting point, the researcher may find it worthwhile to reexamine those collections with an eye to identifying other artifact categories usually associated with the time periods being described. These may not initially have been identified as diagnostic of that particular time period, but now can be seen to belong. It is important, however, to always root the cultural identification in the diagnostic projectile points themselves, as the continuity of form of certain other tool categories does not lend itself to very precise or unambiguous dating.

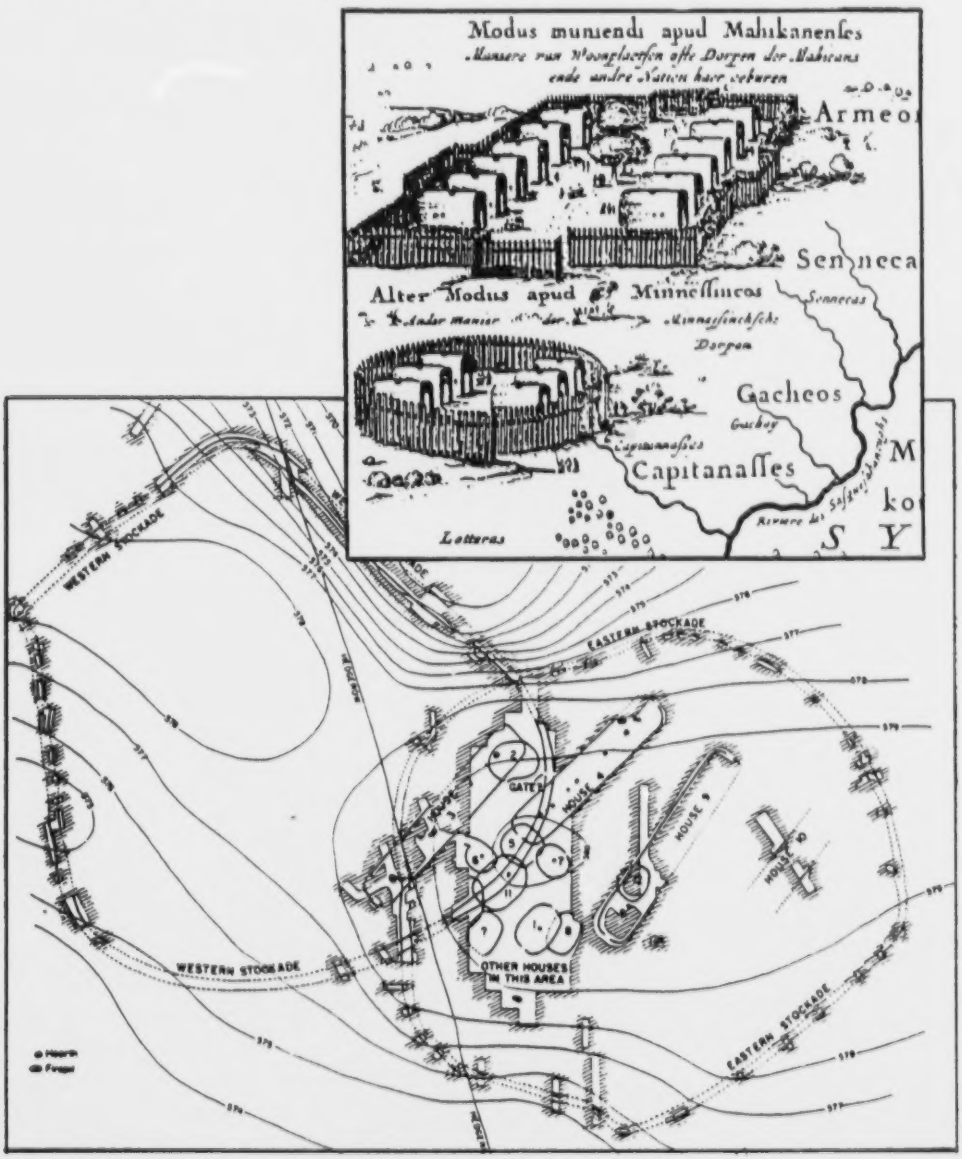
SITE DESCRIPTIONS AND MAPPING

In considering the appropriate level of detail for presenting prehistoric data in local history publications one often has to deal with the question of mapping sites. Archeological sites are extremely rare, are vital to our ability to reconstruct human history before European contact, are exceptionally interesting to collectors and amateur archeologists, and are easily damaged or destroyed by careless excavation or intensive collecting activities.

At the same time, archeological sites are fairly invisible, lying on or beneath the ground. This invisibility affords them a certain measure of natural protection from casual attention. It is probably a good rule of thumb to perpetuate whatever invisibility a site already has as long as possible in order to conserve these fragile and irreplaceable resources for the public benefit. This approach to prehistoric sites is in sharp contrast to approaches typically taken toward historic sites. A great deal of effort is often expended, once an historic site has been identified in the community, to make it more visible. Included in this effort might be the erecting of monuments or plaques,

the publication of photographs and addresses, the identification of the property on historic site maps of the area or even inclusion in local walking tours and regional tourist brochures.

Most historic sites, excluding historic archeological sites, are not as subject, however, to the loss of significant data through vandalism or destruction as are prehistoric sites. They are often backed up by documents and frequently replicated by type. They often benefit from publicity and increased public awareness. It is understandable that historians would wish to include prehistoric sites in their work with as much locational detail as other sites they have dealt with. It may be more appropriate, however, to include



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detailed cultural descriptions, focusing on prehistoric technology and the use of local resources, but give only very generalized site location data.

For example, instead of stating: "Two Archaic campsites producing many artifacts are located on the river flats behind the Peter Smith house," one could state: "Large amounts of artifactual evidence suggest that the river flats in the Smithtown Village area were utilized extensively during the Archaic Period."

If mapping is felt to be necessary, instead of publishing a map of archeological sites in the study area, one could include a map showing only the general habitat or terrain occupied during various prehistoric periods.

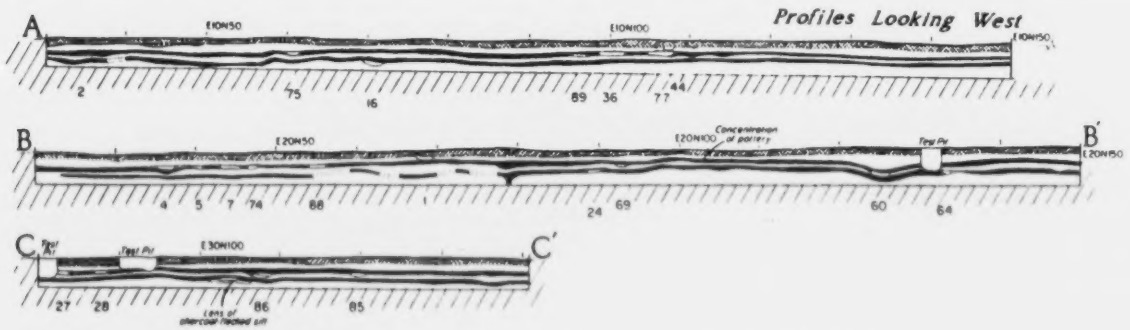
These are considerations every researcher will have to deal with on a case by case basis. There really is no simple answer to the dilemma of "preservation" versus "presentation."

EXPLORATORY FIELD SURVEY

While the excavation of archeological sites is best left to professionals because of the potential loss of important data through careless digging, on-site field study of archeological areas can be conducted by historians and can produce usable and historically significant data without subjecting the sites to any greater destructive impact than they already sustain by virtue of their existence in populated areas.

While many archeological sites are small and represent brief prehistoric occupation or peripheral activity areas, the most productive sites result from prehistoric habitation of some scope and duration. The terrain selected as habitable prehistorically in many cases was selected for the same reasons as for later historic settlement in those areas; namely, fairly level, well drained land with adequate supplies of fresh water. Thus modern farming activities often are focused in the areas most likely also to contain archeological remains from prehistoric times. Cultivation occurring in these areas has the effect of bringing to the surface a sample of the prehistoric artifacts buried in the top 10 or 11 inches of soil. In valley bottoms or other areas where soil is being accumulated through flooding or other forces, prehistoric land surfaces (occupation floors) may be buried many feet below the surface, beyond the reach of the plow. In that situation, only the more recent cultural levels are being excavated by the plowing. It is the buried and undisturbed nature of these stratified sites that makes them especially significant scientific resources which should be protected from nonscientific excavation at all costs.

In upland areas where soil accumulation is minimal, thousands of years of debris from human occupation may exist in a layer of soil and organic matter



only a few inches thick. In this case all of the prehistoric remains are being churned up and incorporated, during cultivation, into a "plow zone," an organically stained topsoil of about 10 inches thickness overlying subsoils that were rarely exposed to prehistoric uses.

By careful examination of cultivated or eroded areas, one might note the existence of prehistoric materials. For the untrained observer, most of these materials (exposures of fire-reddened earth or dark midden soil, scatters of flint chipping debris, pottery sherds, fire-cracked rock, rough stone tools, etc.) will reveal little else but the evident presence of some prehistoric populations. A listing of observed materials and a sketch map of the area in which they occur would certainly be an important contribution to the recording of local history. But collection of the materials will add little to this information and may detract from the scientific value of the site for professional study at a later date.

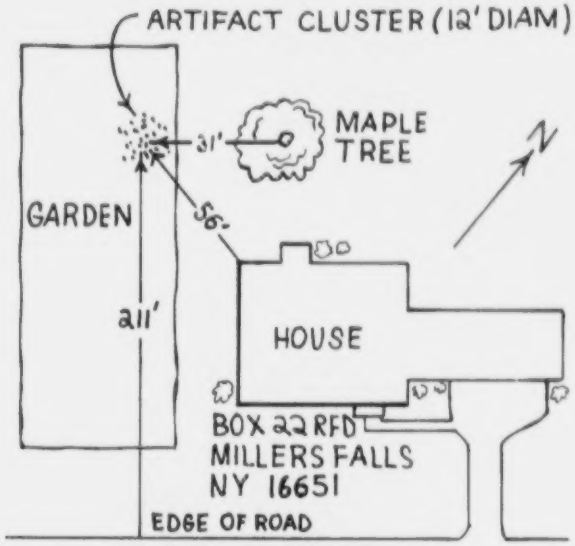
Many people will suggest that "surface collecting" (the removal of artifacts exposed on top of the ground) is harmless, so long as no digging is undertaken that might disturb intact buried deposits of prehistoric remains. But it should be noted that such surface distributions of artifacts are often all there is on a particular site. Information on horizontal clustering of artifact types that might indicate temporal or functional associations for particular areas of the site could be lost if sufficient quantities of artifacts, particularly diagnostic artifacts, were removed. Certain small, upland, single component sites could actually disappear over a number of years of concentrated surface collection unless detailed professional records and highly accurate site maps were maintained.

In one sense, of course, sites are as destroyed by professional excavation as by uncontrolled relic hunting. But by preserving as much of the content of the site as possible in carefully maintained museum or university collections and by creating detailed records of as much of the site as possible during the painstaking excavation process, the scientist translates the site from an invisible cultural entity buried in the ground to a visible cultural entity preserved, described, and explained out of the ground.

For the historian, the most

valuable evidence to be located during such a preliminary field survey is the diagnostic artifact, namely the projectile point. From these artifacts one can assign dates to the site, can reconstruct the range of cultural patterns and lifeways of the people who inhabited the site and can, therefore, fill out the pre-Colonial portion of the local historical reconstruction.

The precise location of artifacts, especially diagnostic ones, on a site can be vital information for the archeologist. The techniques and equipment required for accurate mapping of artifacts are usually not part of the local historian's standard field survey operation. It is best, therefore, to leave the artifacts in the field after on-the-spot examination, unless there is some immediate danger of loss through erosion, construction, or collection by others. If the only anticipated threat to the artifact is from collectors, it is preferable to replace the item and cover it with a thin layer of soil, leaves, or debris exactly where it was found, rather than to remove it from the site.



MAP OF SITE "T-14"
BY: MARY CARTER 10/18/90

Before recording individual artifacts in the field, a sketch map of the survey area should be made on which individual finds can be plotted. Each artifact should be outlined on paper in pencil and a sketch made of its shape and surface features (chipping patterns, breaks, etc.). A comparison should be made in the field between the actual artifacts and illustrations of artifacts in your reference materials to more accurately identify the type. Notes on each artifact can be entered in a note book next to the drawing for later reference. It is a good idea to assign numbers or names to the survey areas and identify each recorded artifact by these. Copies of the survey map and associated artifact information should be filed with a secure historical or archeological institution, such as a museum, historical society, or university. A copy should also be forwarded to the Office of the State Archeologist for entry into the statewide prehistoric archeological site file.

Having located and reported on a prehistoric site, the local historian accepts a certain amount of responsibility for its protection from random or careless exploitation. The disposition of these detailed field records, which contain exact locations of artifact producing areas and may be misused by relic collectors if made public, becomes a matter of professional

concern and should not be treated lightly.

If all alternatives for the preservation of the artifacts on the site have been exhausted and artifacts must be collected, they should be placed in envelopes on which important provenience data can be recorded, one artifact per envelope.

Provenience is a critical factor in the preservation of archeological data and refers to the location of each artifact in three-dimensional space. In archeological excavations this means its horizontal position on the site and its vertical position in the ground. Provenience data allows an artifact to be assigned an age and cultural affiliation by virtue of its association with datable organic remains. It also reveals associations with other excavated artifacts and in-ground features recorded on the site, which may suggest activities that occurred on the site thousands of years ago. In the type of surface survey suggested here, horizontal location is the only critical factor since all materials are found on the surface and have already been removed from their original vertical position by cultivation, and because excavation is not, and should not be, a component of the study.

SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have already stressed the importance of protecting the locations of prehistoric remains due to the pressure on such resources from relic collectors and untrained excavators. In beginning the assembly of local information on prehistoric sites, the historian may run into considerable resistance from museums, universities, archeologists and collectors when trying to reconstruct the locations of already known sites within the research area. This resistance may arise from concerns about site protection, or it may arise from a sense of territoriality or personal research interest. In either case, one must honor the concerns of persons or institutions who have already expended considerable money and effort in locating and documenting archeological sites.

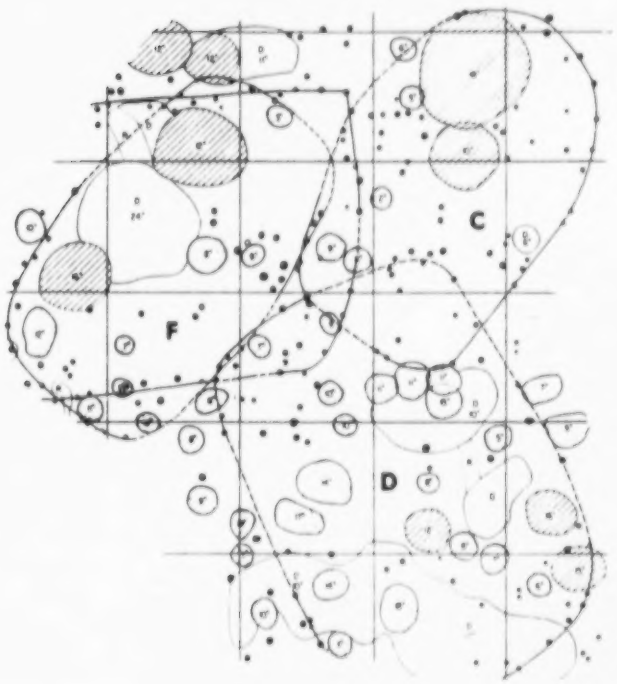
In some cases, if one explains the intent of the study and shared concerns about the protection of site locations, and describes the measures to be taken to perpetuate that protection through the use of generalized location data and filing of site data with appropriate institutions, one may be provided with sufficient information to pursue the investigation.

It is also important that in one's own local field survey efforts one not violate any formal or informal prior relationships of archeologists to these sites and that any field activities be coordinated with those who have indicated a prior research interest.

A priority in any field operation is concern for the rights of the landowner. If the area is publicly owned, such as the rights-of-way of public roads, parks, etc., permission should be obtained before entering the land, and in some cases a permit may be required for

any form of archeological activity on the public lands.

If privately held, permission of the landowner should be obtained, even if the land is not formally posted against trespassing. It must be understood that materials collected from the land of private persons, corporations, etc. belong to the landowners by law and may not be removed from the premises without their expressed consent. At the same



time one is discussing access to the property and the disposition of any collected materials, one may wish to explain the project and inquire as to whether the landowner wishes to impose any additional restrictions on the manner in which the findings are reported or published.

Prehistoric archeological sites are one component of our nonrenewable cultural resources. In recent years the protection of cultural resources has been increasingly addressed in federal and state legislation. It is important to understand how this legislation affects possible research on archeological sites. These laws and regulations help to preserve our dwindling supply of prehistoric sites and to insure that archeological areas, when excavated by trained scientists, provide meaningful data about our prehistoric predecessors. Since the excavation of archeological sites in effect destroys them forever, it is critical that care be taken to maximize the information obtained from sites during the process of excavation.

For this reason it is not recommended that anyone but professionally trained archeologists excavate in archeological site areas. Detailed and controlled excavation techniques, fine stratigraphic analysis, artifact or soil sample collection techniques, detailed note-taking and data recording, accurate site mapping and profile drawing are skills essential to the preservation of accurate, historically useful data during the excavation of prehistoric sites. These skills often take years of formal training and many seasons of field experience to fully develop.

Archeological sites may be regarded in the same manner archivists view rare and fragile documents. There is a correct and an incorrect way to "handle" both, the price of incorrect handling being the permanent loss of the information they contain.

SUMMARY

Community history projects have an opportunity to expand their depth and interest by including up to 10,000 years of human habitation that may have occurred in the locality being researched. The results of this can be profound, both in broadening the community's perception of its roots and in creating a better understanding of the place of that community in the evolution of the interaction of people with their environment.

Such an integration of prehistoric and historic information at the community level also places the local historian, historical society, or history teacher in a better position to address the needs and interests of children and students who come in contact with evidence of prehistoric human activity in their own backyards.

Awareness of the true nature of these local archeological resources and of their value as sources of information and understanding, not just artifacts, will foster a climate in which their preservation can be better secured.

The involvement of local historians in this effort is essential, and it is hoped that this brief introduction will lead to a fuller realization of the prehistoric heritage we all share as citizens of New York.

INFORMATION

Site reporting forms and maps for transferring field data to the New York State Museum Archeological Site File are available. For additional materials, help and information, write to: The Office of the State Archeologist, Room CEC 3122, Empire State Plaza, Albany, New York 12230.

INCLUDED WITH THIS GUIDE:

- A current publications list indicating materials available from the New York State Museum that relate to this topic, and instructions on how to order them.
- A copy of each available New York State Museum leaflet dealing with archeology.
- A sample site reporting form that can be used to report data to the State Archeologist's staff at the New York State Museum.
- A sheet indicating contact staff and phone numbers to call if you need help, wish information or advice, or require copies of base maps on which to record your local site location information for transmission to the State Museum.

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